

The effect of studying a text by an author of colour:

The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot



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Lit in *colour*

Commissioned by:





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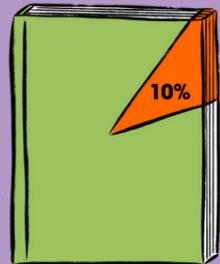
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Key Findings

*indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level (i.e. less than 5% likelihood of happening by chance)
**indicates statistical significance at the 0.01 level (i.e. less than 1% likelihood of happening by chance)

Texts



10% of students taking Pearson Edexcel GCSE English Literature now study a text by an author of colour.



This is 100x more students

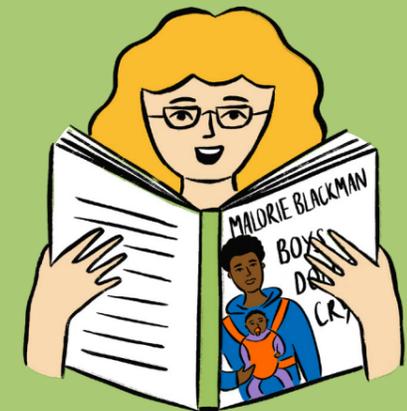
than before the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot Programme.

Empathy

Students raised increased empathy and understanding of others as key learning outcomes from studying the text in interviews.

Engagement

Teachers and students report higher levels of classroom engagement when studying Pioneers texts. Teachers also report that the texts enable greater cognitive engagement as seen in whole text understanding and analysis.



Relevance

Students were more likely to report that they found the stories and characters in the books that they read felt relevant to their lives and community after reading one of the Pioneers texts*.

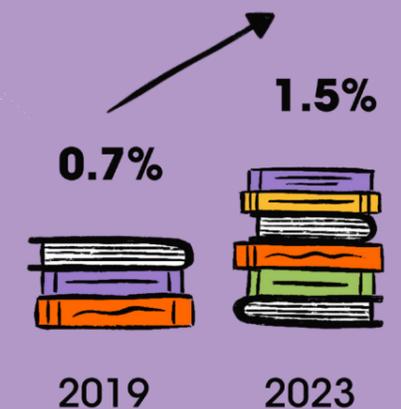
Student interest

Students were less likely to report that they were 'often bored' in school after studying one of the Pioneers texts*.



Authors of colour

The overall percentage of students answering on a text by an author of colour for GCSE in England has more than doubled from 0.7% in 2019 to 1.5% in 2023. This change is solely due to the change in the numbers of students answering on a text by an author of colour on Pearson Edexcel examinations.



About Lit in Colour

The Lit in Colour campaign was created in 2020 by Penguin Books as a long term social impact programme to support UK schools make the teaching and learning of English Literature more inclusive of authors of colour. Together with principle partner, The Runnymede Trust, the UK's leading race equality think-tank, the campaign published research in 2021 highlighting the barriers preventing schools from teaching more books by authors of colour from primary up to secondary. It found that less than 1% of GCSE students in England read a book by an author of colour, and that teachers had little to no training in how to talk about race and racism in the classroom. The research established that the main barriers responsible for this underrepresentation are: time, money, subject knowledge and confidence.

Since then, the campaign has been working with partners and stakeholders across the education and publishing sectors to find innovative and practical ways to give schools the support and tools they need to introduce more books by authors of colour into the classroom, for all ages. The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot was developed in partnership with exam board Pearson Edexcel in 2021 and was one of the first major activities the campaign undertook to meet this aim in secondary schools.

Books are only one part of the debate about diversity in the curriculum, but they are an important one: nearly every young person in England studies English Literature to 16. Books offer a unique way to see the world through

another's eyes and to develop a deeper understanding of society.

Over the last three years there has been a shift and all of the four exam boards in England now offer a wider range of works by authors of colour in their set texts for English Literature GCSE and A level. Since 2021 the Lit in Colour campaign has:

- donated over 250,000 books to schools across the UK,
- supported the publication of free interactive teaching resources for all ages,
- supported the addition of new texts by partner exam board OCR,
- collaborated with Oxford University Press to support parents and primary teachers,
- joined forces with Bloomsbury to introduce new plays and teaching resources to create more representative and inclusive drama experiences,
- partnered with Twinkl on a suite of free primary teaching resources,
- hosted free training and webinars on approaching race with Tes,
- partnered with Peters Books to promote inclusive book packs to libraries and schools,
- collaborated with the National Literacy Trust and British Library on Inclusive Libraries Conferences.

'The first chapter of Lit in Colour was about understanding the nature and scale of the challenge (or opportunity, if you prefer to look at it that way). The rest of the story must be about how we tackle it.'

Tom Weldon, CEO of Penguin Books UK, writing in the first Lit in Colour report

Lit in Colour partners and stakeholders:



“
**Broadening the scope of
the literature available
inevitably leads to a
broadening of outlook
and horizons, providing
the inspiration that
leads to aspiration.**
”

Foreword

by **Malorie Blackman**

Stories. Surely there is no better way to make sense of this world, ourselves and others than via stories. The benefits of reading have been well documented, including but not limited to improving our mental health and wellbeing, allowing us to be able to grasp new ideas and concepts more readily, improving vocabulary, engendering a sense of empathy, fostering understanding of others and the list goes on.

The evolution of stories cannot be static. They, in all their forms, have to move, change and adapt with the times. There will always be room for the classics in the UK English Literature curricula but a space and place needs to be made for more inclusive and diverse contemporary stories across all educational boards. These stories, as told by a more diverse cohort of authors, have a relevance, relatability and appeal across all readerships as evidenced by the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot research, 2024.

No child should ever feel that studying English at school is irrelevant because they never see themselves and their lives reflected in the literature they are tasked to read. Broadening the scope of the literature available inevitably leads to a broadening of outlook and horizons, providing the inspiration that leads to aspiration.

A National Literacy Trust annual survey (Sep 4, 2023) reported that children's reading enjoyment was

at its lowest level in almost two decades, with over half of 8-18 year-olds stating that they don't enjoy reading in their free time.

Over the many years that I have been an author, I have seen for myself how stories can flip the mental switch which leads to a love of not just reading but many other creative endeavours, with all the myriad benefits that may bring.

The last few years have seen a drastic decline in the uptake of English at A level - from 79,000 in 2016 to 54,000 in 2023. One way to stem this outgoing tide would be to improve the perceived relevance of the texts set in the English curriculum across all exam boards to increase engagement. This Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot research has shown the positive impact that this can and does have.

Having an English exam curriculum which has a more diverse base when it comes to the literature studied by our children is a matter of enrichment, engagement and sheer common sense and not one of special pleading. If we wish to tackle the thorny topic of children who seem to be growing more disaffected by reading for pleasure and in the classroom, then the promotion of books seen to be more relevant and relatable to their own lives and perceptions of society is a crucial first step.

Malorie Blackman

Introduction

The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot Programme

In 2019, exam board Pearson introduced a new set of diverse set texts to their Pearson Edexcel English Literature GCSE. These were due for first examination in 2021, but due to the pandemic the first examination actually fell in 2022. A further set of texts by authors of colour were introduced for A level Literature for teaching from 2022. The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot was conceptualised before the first Lit in Colour report was published (Elliott et al., 2021), but the design echoed the findings of that report in trying to remove the barriers that prevent teachers from switching to texts by authors of colour. Namely, the expense of buying new books, the lack of time to invest in developing new knowledge, resources and schemes of work, the lack of teacher knowledge of texts and contexts in relation to this literature, and the lack of confidence in discussing race in the classroom.

The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot offered an opportunity to alleviate the barriers of time, money, knowledge and confidence in order to support teachers and schools to change their set texts; increasing the number of students who would study a text by an author of colour for their GCSE examination. Diversifying the racial representation of authors that feature on the GCSE and A level specifications is important for all students: students of colour need to see themselves represented in the curriculum (Bishop 1990), to feel recognised by the schools of which they are a part. All

students need to be prepared to live in the diverse multicultural society that is Britain today, and making these changes is part of that. 70% of young people surveyed for On Road's report featured in the first Lit in Colour report (2021) agreed that diversity is part of British society and as such should be represented in the school curriculum.

The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot programme presented an unprecedented chance to examine the effects of studying a text by an author of colour in the UK. It is important to have empirical data to support the principle of diversifying the curriculum in this way, because this helps to drive change in policy, and to reassure those who want to switch to a text by an author of colour, but who might be worried about the impact. Here we report results from quantitative and qualitative data collection from students and teachers involved in the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot programme.

By partnering with Lit in Colour, the Pioneers Pilot programme was able to arrange for the donation of set texts to schools by publishers (Bloomsbury (who became a Lit in Colour named partner in 2022), Hachette, HarperCollins imprints 4th Estate and Farshore, Serpent's Tail, Nick Hern Books, Concord Theatricals Ltd and Penguin Books). This represents an unusually high level of collaboration across the publishing industry to make the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot programme possible.

Schools who signed up received:

- a full set of the GCSE and/or A level set text of their choice,
- a series of free resources including CPD training webinars for teachers and school librarians. Training included racial literacy CPD delivered by The Black Curriculum in one year,
- mini library donation of books by authors of colour from Penguin Books,
- support programmes of work for each set text, with creative content from authors including videos, events and a range of specific resources.



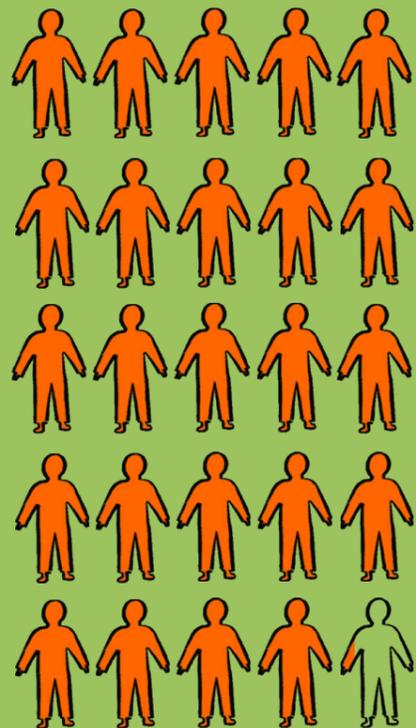
Author Q&A Events for teachers and students

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 <u>Boys Don't Cry</u>
Malorie Blackman with Jeremiah Emmanuel <i>GCSE virtual event</i></p> | <p>5 <u>A Thousand Splendid Suns</u>
Khaled Hosseini with Razia Iqbal <i>A Level virtual event</i></p> |
| <p>2 <u>Refugee Boy</u>
Benjamin Zephaniah with Lynette Goddard <i>GCSE virtual event</i></p> | <p>6 <u>Home Fire</u>
Kamila Shamsi with Sarah Shaffi <i>A Level virtual event</i></p> |
| <p>3 <u>The Empress</u>
Tanika Gupta with Jane Garnett <i>GCSE virtual event</i></p> | <p>7 <u>Beloved</u>
Toni Morrison (Patricia Cumper & Rosanna Amaka) <i>A Level virtual event</i></p> |
| <p>4 <u>The Lonely Londoners</u>
Sam Selvon (Susheila Nasta & Derek Owusu) <i>A Level virtual event</i></p> | <p>8 <u>Sweat</u>
Lynn Nottage (Lynnette Linton & Andrew Green)</p> |

The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot programme has supported over 250 schools and 29,000 learners.

29,000 learners

256 schools



 = 1,000 learners

 = 25 schools

Each school received 300 books suitable for KS3-5 from 2021-2023, with one class set (30-35 copies) of a text along with colourful posters and artwork. Training was commissioned from the School Library Association which took participants through the donation to give them ideas of how to use the texts and support students with reading for pleasure – these virtual events are available via the [Lit in Colour playlist on the Pearson UK Educators YouTube channel](#). Additional copies of books were given out at conferences and other events, including the Lit in Colour Student Conferences held in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

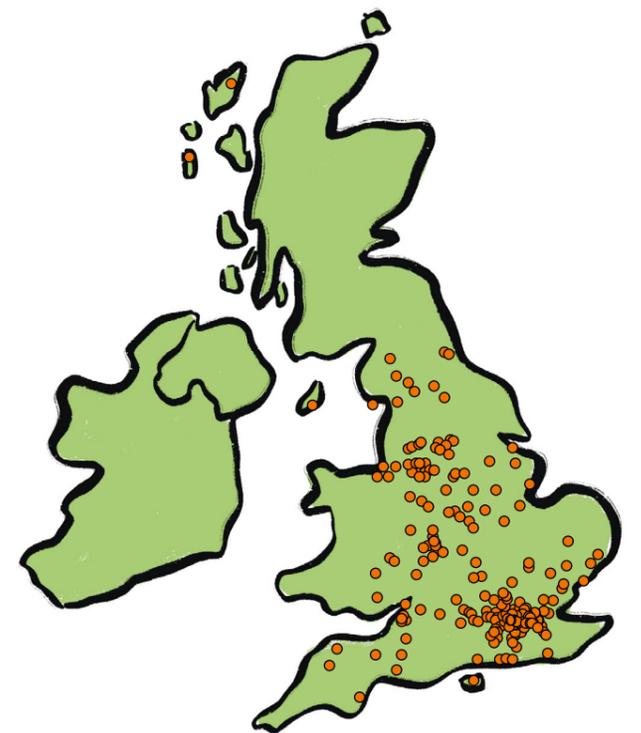
To date, 256 schools and 310 cohorts (schools can choose to sign up for GCSE or A level cohorts, or both) have been recruited to the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot programme. This represents over 29,000 learners since 2021 who have studied a text supported by the programme.

Figure 1 shows how the schools are distributed over the UK – largely across England (where the pilot was targeted) but with two schools in the Outer Hebrides and one on the Isle of Man. There are strong clusters in the most ethnically diverse cities of the UK (London, Manchester and Birmingham, with a smaller cluster in Leeds) but these are also the largest cities with the highest concentration of schools. There is also wide distribution across England with schools spread over East Anglia and the North-East in particular, which tend to have a higher White population, along with a small cluster on the South Coast.

This represents a total of 117,480 books by authors of colour donated to schools in the UK, including the projected estimate for set texts for the 2024 programme. The most popular GCSE set texts requested by schools are Malorie Blackman's *Boys Don't Cry* (n=9,995 copies), Tanika Gupta's *The Empress* (n=6,325) and the play version of Benjamin

Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy*, adapted by Lemn Sissay (n=4,923). At A level the distribution is more spread out but the most popular are Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (n=1,264) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (n=1,198).

Figure 1:
Geographical distribution of Lit in Colour Pioneers schools



A note on terminology

As we noted in the first Lit in Colour report:

'The language related to race and racialisation (assigning ethnic or racial identities to a group from the outside) has always been contested; there are not fixed categories or definitions and the terminology is always political. Terms relating to race are closely tied into personal and collective identities and preferences; they rely on connotations as well as denotations.'
(Elliott et al. 2021, p. 10).

As before here we explain some of the decisions made in relation to terminology. In the first report we used the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). The terminology is problematic in that it conceals inequalities between different groups and it is not a category with which individuals identify. As usage has moved on we have too: in this report we refer to people of colour, although this has similar problems with erosion of differences between specific groups. Its use here is inclusive of all racially minoritised groups in the UK, including Gypsy Roma Traveller communities.

In this report we refer to 'authors of colour' in relation to the texts. This is consistent with the first Lit in Colour report and appropriate in relation to the racial

heritage of the authors of the texts in question. In relation to participants we have given specific demographic groups drawn from census categories (with the note that it is flawed that there is a White British category, but no option for Black British).

As before we recognise that race is a social construct, principally created as the object of racism. We have capitalised 'White' to reflect that Whiteness is also a construct. To be White is not a neutral state (i.e. Eddo-Lodge 2017). Where quoting from others we have used their capitalisation and terminology.

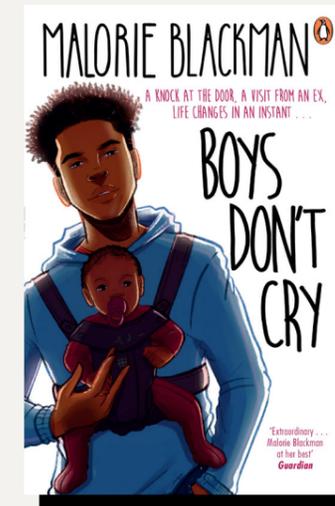
The word 'diversity' is also used in relation to reading and curriculum. The focus here is primarily on the diversity of ethnicity in authors and characters, and it is likely that participants who use the word are thinking of that form of diversity, but diversity also includes many other categories which are underrepresented in our curriculum and school texts, including but not limited to LGBTQIA+ and disabled people.

It is also worth acknowledging at this point that the word 'Pioneers' has specific connotations in relation to the colonisation of the USA. In the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot the word refers to the idea of being early adopters, but we recognise that the word has difficult connotations for some groups.

Lit in Colour Pioneers Texts

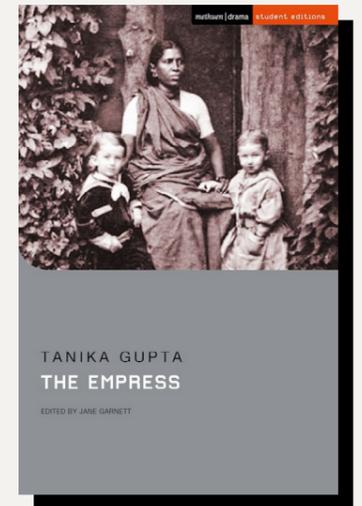
GCSE

GCSE and A Level texts by authors of colour offered on the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot



Boys Don't Cry Malorie Blackman Penguin Books

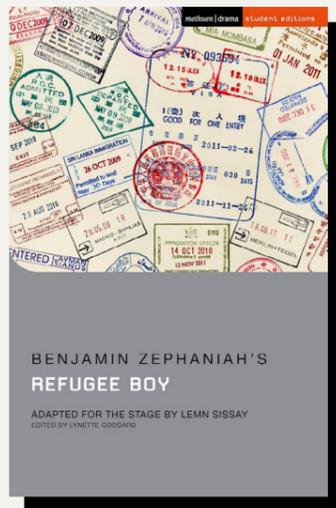
Written from the point of view of two teenage brothers: Dante, who is looking forward to university and a successful career, unexpectedly finds himself faced with the demands of full-time single parenthood, and Adam, who is happy to be gay and makes no secret of it, but ultimately suffers from the intolerance of those around him. A hard-hitting novel dealing with some of the real issues facing teenagers. This is also a moving story about father-son relationships and human connection.



The Empress Tanika Gupta Bloomsbury

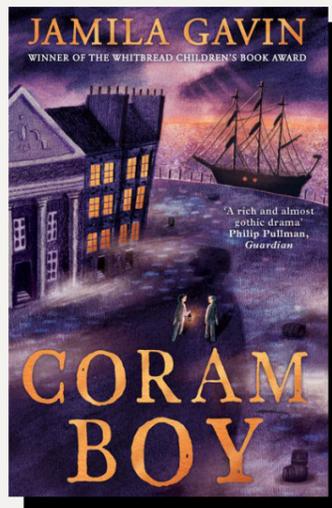
Through narrative, music and song, *The Empress* blends the true story of Queen Victoria's controversial relationship with her Indian servant and 'Munshi' (teacher), Abdul Karim, with the experiences of Indian ayahs who came to Britain during the 19th century. With private romance being mapped onto world history, the action cuts between the ship and different royal residences, offering bright contrasts as well as surprising affinities. In doing so, the play uncovers remarkable unknown stories of 19th-century Britain and charts the growth of Indian nationalism.

GCSE



Refugee Boy
Lemn Sissay
Bloomsbury

As civil war rages back home in Ethiopia, teenager Alem and his father are in a B&B in Berkshire. The next morning his father is gone and has left a note explaining that he wants to protect Alem from the war. England is now home. In the hands of the social services and the Refugee Council, Alem lives from letter to letter. He meets Mustapha, Ruth and Sweeney – three unexpected allies who spur him on to be seen as more than just the Refugee Boy.



Coram Boy
Jamila Gavin
Farshore

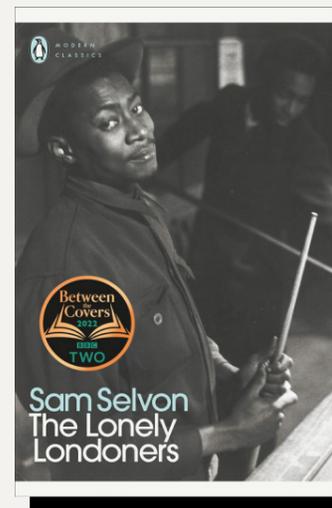
The Coram man takes babies and money from desperate mothers, promising to deliver them safely to a Foundling Hospital in London. Instead, he murders them to the helpless horror of his mentally ill son, Mish. Mish saves one, Aaron, who grows up happily unaware of his history, proving himself a promising musician. As Aaron's new life takes him closer to his real family, the watchful Mish makes a terrible mistake, delivering Aaron and his best friend Toby back into the hands of the Coram man.



Anita & Me
Meera Syal
4th Estate

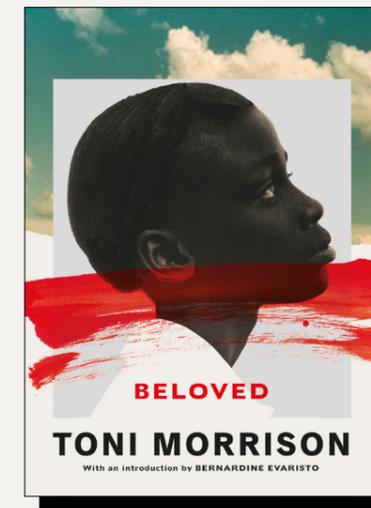
It's 1972. Meena is nine years old and lives in the village of Tollington, 'the jewel of the Black Country'. She is the daughter of Indian parents who have come to England to give her a better life. As one of the few Punjabi inhabitants of her village, her daily struggle for independence is different from most. Meena wants fishfingers and chips, an English Christmas, but more than anything, she wants to roam the backyards of working-class Tollington with feisty Anita Rutter and her gang.

A-Level



The Lonely Londoners
Sam Selvon
Penguin Books

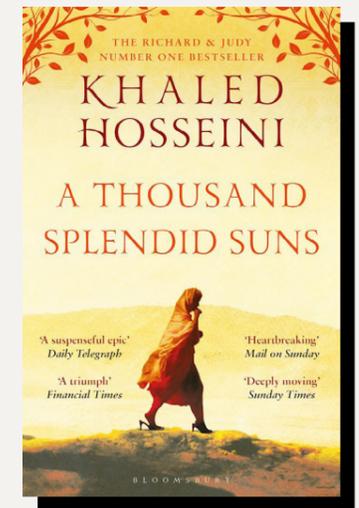
At Waterloo Station, new arrivals from the West Indies step off the boat train, ready to start afresh in 1950s London. There, homesick Moses Aloetta, meets Henry 'Sir Galahad' Oliver and shows him the ropes. In this strange city where the natives can be unfriendly at the sight of a black face, Galahad met his Waterloo? All the other lonely new Londoners must try to create a new life for themselves. As pessimistic 'old veteran' Moses watches their attempts, they gradually learn to survive.



Beloved
Toni Morrison
Penguin Books

Sethe is now miles away from Sweet Home - the farm where she was kept as a slave for many years. Unable to forget the unspeakable horrors that took place there, Sethe is haunted by the violent spectre of her dead child, the daughter who died nameless and whose tombstone is etched with a single word, 'Beloved'.

A tale of brutality, horror and, above all, love at any cost, *Beloved* is Toni Morrison's enduring masterpiece and best-known work.



A Thousand Splendid Suns
Khaled Hosseini
Bloomsbury

Mariam is only fifteen when she is sent to Kabul to marry Rasheed. Nearly two decades later, a friendship grows between Mariam and a local teenager, Laila, as strong as the ties between mother and daughter. When the Taliban take over, life becomes a desperate struggle against starvation, brutality and fear. Yet love can move a person to act in unexpected ways, and lead them to overcome the most daunting obstacles with a startling heroism.

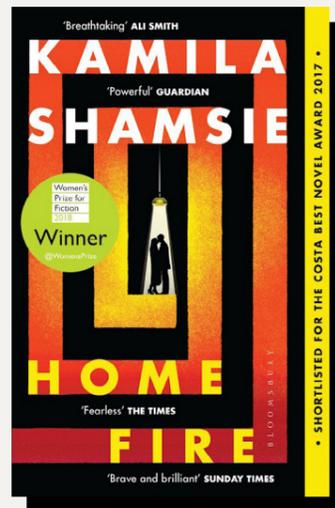
A-Level



Sweat
Lynn Nottage
Nick Hern Books

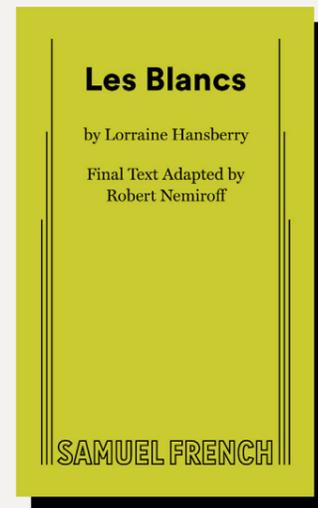
In one of the poorest cities in America – Reading, Pennsylvania – a group of factory workers struggle to keep their present lives in balance, ignorant of the financial devastation looming in their near future.

Based on the playwright's extensive interviews with residents of Reading, Lynn Nottage's play *Sweat* is a tale of friends pitted against each other by big business, and a topical reflection of the present and poignant decline of the American Dream.



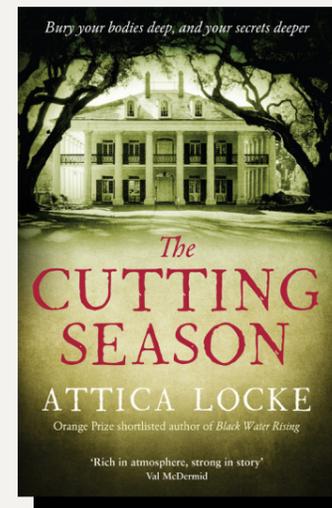
Home Fire
Kamila Shamsie
Bloomsbury

After years spent raising her twin siblings in the wake of their mother's death, Isma is finally studying in America, resuming a dream long deferred. But she can't stop worrying about her sister Aneeka, back in London – or their brother, Parvaiz, who's disappeared. Then Eamonn enters the sisters' lives. Handsome and privileged. As the son of a powerful British Muslim politician, Eamonn has his own birthright to live up to – or defy. Is he to be a chance at love? The means of Parvaiz's salvation?



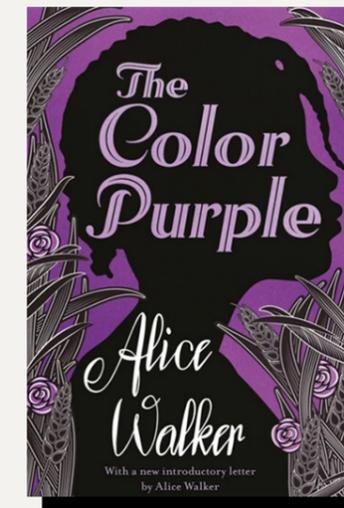
Les Blancs
Lorraine Hansberry
Concord Theatricals

Les Blancs prophetically confronts the hope and tragedy of Africa in revolution. Set in a Christian mission in a colony about to explode, no one can evade the consequences of white colonialism and imperatives of black liberation. Tshembe Matoseh, the English educated son of a chief, has returned to bury his father. His teenage brother is an alcoholic and his older brother a priest and traitor to his people. Tshembe must decide how to act while the powerful Spirit of Africa pursues him.



The Cutting Season
Attica Locke
Serpent's Tail

Caren inspects the grounds of Belle Vie, the historic plantation house she manages. The gardener calls to tell her she missed something: a woman lying face down in a grave, her throat cut. There will be police asking questions. The family who own Belle Vie have to be told. A school group is on the way to visit. Where is Donovan, the member of staff no one has seen? As Caren lives on site with her daughter, she wonders: how much danger are they in?



The Color Purple
Alice Walker
Hachette

Separated as girls, sisters Celie and Nettie sustain their connection to each other across time, distance and silence through letters spanning twenty years. Abused repeatedly by the man she calls 'father', Celie's children are taken away from her and she's trapped into an ugly marriage. When she meets the glamorous Shug Avery, singer and magic-maker – a woman who has taken charge of her own destiny, Celie discovers the power of her own spirit. Free from her past, she is reunited with those she loves.

“
One teacher described the way that the higher levels of engagement with *Boys Don't Cry* ‘just kind of lit the fire in them.’
”

Findings

Change in proportion of students answering on texts by an author of colour

Table 1 shows the proportion of students answering on each set text for Pearson Edexcel English Literature GCSE from 2019 to 2023 (no examinations were held in 2020 or 2021 because of the pandemic).² This shows a year on year increase in the overall proportion of students answering on a text by an author of colour.

These data show that 10% of all candidates in the Pearson Edexcel GCSE in 2023 answered on a text by an author of colour. This is 100 times the percentage in 2019, and represents 0.85% of the entire GCSE English Literature cohort. That is, **the number of candidates answering on a text by an author of colour for Pearson Edexcel GCSE English Literature alone in 2023 was greater than the total number of students across all boards in 2019.** The total percentage of the GCSE English Literature cohort across all four exam boards in 2023 answering on a text by an author of colour was 1.5% (8,906 students from an entry of 582,995), compared to 0.7% in 2019 (approximately 3,700 students from an entry of 537,355). The increase between 2019 and 2023 is entirely accounted for

by the increase in Pearson Edexcel's text choice data. Increased diversity in set texts on the English Literature specifications offered by exam boards AQA, OCR and Eduqas has not yet worked its way through the system; some of these texts are being examined for the first time in 2024, and some will be examined for the first time in 2025.

Teachers responding to the survey were largely positive about changes in the range of set texts that are now available for study, but a substantial number of them warned that the canon was 'still largely white male and dead', and that there was still not sufficient racial diversity in the options available. One suggested that:

'There is growing diversity but I do not believe it is still an accurate reflection of the modern world at this current time.'

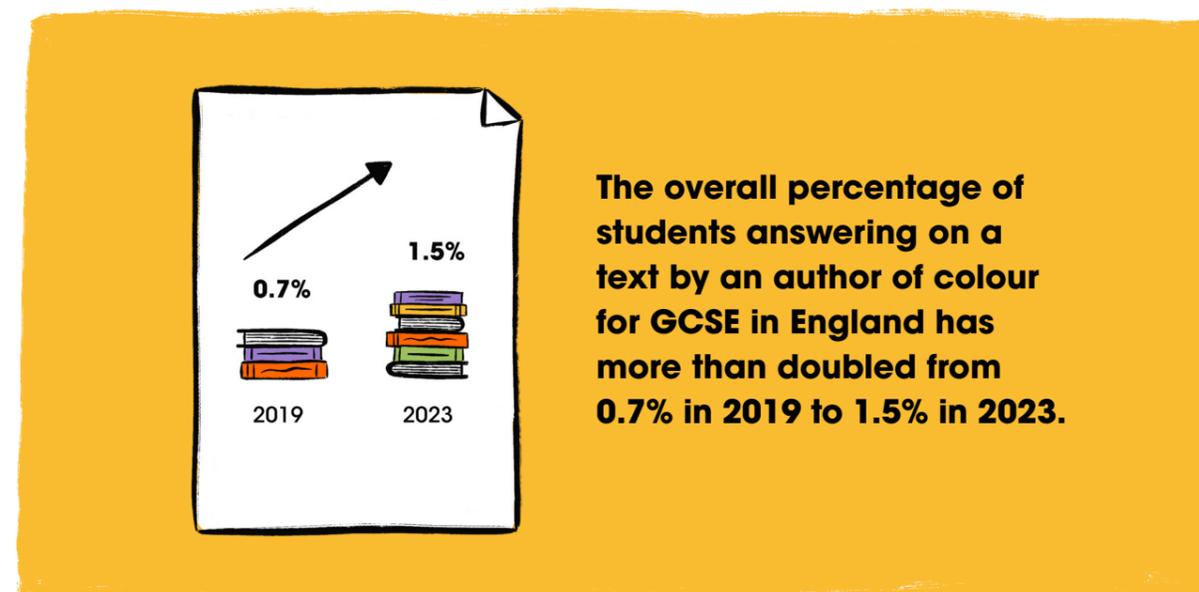
While progress has been made, it is limited, partly because of the structure of the GCSE requiring study of a 19th century novel.

² These percentages are generated from the question numbers recorded by examiners while marking. We can only say how many candidates answered on a given text, but this is a reasonable proxy for the number of students who studied that text. A few candidates choose to answer exam questions on texts they have not studied.

Table 1: Pearson Edexcel GCSE Literature set text choices 2019-2023

Set Modern Text	% of all candidates		
	June 2019	June 2022	June 2023
An Inspector Calls	62.4	70.5	62.7
Hobson's Choice	1.1	0.9	0.8
Blood Brothers	9.4	7	6.7
Journey's End	5.4	7.75	8.2
Animal Farm	8.9	5.6	5.8
Lord of the Flies	6.7	4.1	4.2
<i>Anita and Me</i>	0.1	0.1	0.1
The Woman in Black	3.6	2.2	1.7
<i>The Empress</i>	n/a	0.4	2
<i>Boys Don't Cry</i>	n/a	1	4.8
<i>Refugee Boy</i>	n/a	0.2	2.4
<i>Coram Boy</i>	n/a	0.06	0.7

Italic text denotes books by authors of colour.



The effect of studying a text by an author of colour

Engagement

Teachers and students report higher levels of classroom engagement when studying Lit in Colour Pioneers texts. Students in the matched dataset were less likely to report being 'often bored in class' in relation to school after studying one of the Lit in Colour Pioneers texts*. One teacher in the survey noted that *Boys Don't Cry* was so popular among the year group studying it that younger students had been actively seeking it out from the library to read themselves. Of the 177 students who responded to a question asking them what they thought of their Lit in Colour Pioneers text, 104 answered in definite positive terms (excluding 'alright' or 'okay'). One student in interview recalled wanting to know 'what

happened next' and looking forward to their English lessons as a result.

In interviews students also displayed a nuanced view, suggesting that a mix of texts was important. In both interviews and surveys they often referenced the importance of studying Shakespeare's works. But others referenced the idea that canon literature made them feel that English was not for them:

'Shakespeare makes you feel small.'

Whereas studying their Lit in Colour Pioneers text made them feel **'smart'**.

It is worth noting that Ofqual requires set texts to be comparable in difficulty at GCSE, so this should not be taken as a lack of challenge in the texts.

Case Study

Boys Don't Cry at UTC Derby

For staff at UTC Derby, *Boys Don't Cry* offers a perfect way to engage students in the importance of English. The school is a 14-18 University Technical College specialising in engineering and health sciences. But English is crucial for the students because:

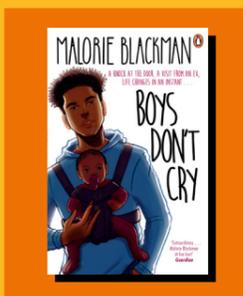
'They've got to understand the world around them and the people they work with and be empathetic with the people they work with.'

– Lee Kirkwood, Principal UTC Derby

Malorie Blackman's *Boys Don't Cry* has been the mechanism for achieving that, and dispelling misconceptions that English is not relevant for the subjects and careers the school focuses on preparing students for. Prominent wall displays demonstrate the importance of the novel to the school, and the English department talk passionately about the 'lifechanging' teaching of the novel and the ways that the book has changed the way their students engage with English lessons. It's also been a major success for their attainment:

'Academically for us it's been phenomenal and groundbreaking in that we've gone from 50% pass rate grade 4 and above to 76% pass rate and the only thing we've changed is this novel.'

– Hayley Robathan, Curriculum Director for English



One White student commented that he hadn't really thought about the unfairness of certain groups not being represented in the curriculum before, but on studying *Boys Don't Cry* and being prompted to think about it, he could see how necessary it was for diversity to be part of the curriculum.

Other students enthused about how they see the book as being relevant to their lives now, and how studying it has made them start or re-start reading outside the curriculum:

'I think that Boys Don't Cry has really impacted the books I read, because I used to stick to a very specific genre, but now that I've read a book like Boys Don't Cry, it's made me want to reach out into different type of books and stories and read them.'

– Jess, a year ten student

'I didn't actually read much at home, other than what I read at school and reading Boys Don't Cry has really influenced me to take books from the library and read them at home.'

– Mia, a year ten student

Teachers reported in the interviews that the choice of texts enabled greater cognitive engagement on the part of students. One teacher described the way that the higher levels of engagement with *Boys Don't Cry* 'just kind of lit the fire in them.' One teacher, at a school which had chosen *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage, noted that the play was an excellent transition text from GCSE because the more modern context and the lack of confusion over what was going on (compared to their previously taught play *The Duchess of Malfi*) enabled the teachers to introduce the students to important disciplinary concepts more rapidly. They also saw an increase in enjoyment and engagement in the year group studying the new text. The teacher also noted that *Sweat* engaged the students in intersectional analysis, bringing to bear their insights from the study of other subjects like politics and psychology.

The discussions interviewers had with some students reflected this sense of greater cognitive engagement. One Year 11 boy discussed animatedly the fact that he had come to realise that all of his texts (*Boys Don't Cry*, *Macbeth* and *Jekyll & Hyde*) spoke to the theme of 'toxic masculinity'. The connection across texts from his analysis of attitudes towards Dante's brother in *Boys Don't Cry* to his analysis of the character of Macbeth demonstrated a very high-level understanding of both texts and the ability to think about literature as a wider field of study rather than as simply the study of individual texts. Another student generated an evidently new response to the text mid-interview, reflecting on the time span shown in the book.

A teacher from a school for deaf children noted that since their students were all British Sign Language speakers as their first language, they sometimes struggled with studying English Literature texts and

written English. The choice of *Boys Don't Cry* was a deliberate strategy to try to increase engagement; the teachers said that having taught it they had noticed increased levels of attention in lessons, and in the quality of responses from students.

Relevance

Relevance and engagement were closely linked in teachers' responses in the interviews and in the limited survey data. One teacher reported that the Lit in Colour Pioneers text

'engaged students on a much deeper level because of its relevance to their own experiences'.

The matched set of pre and post responses showed that students were more likely to report that they found the stories and characters in the books that they read felt relevant to their lives and community after reading one of the Lit in Colour Pioneers texts*. A teacher reported in the survey that they felt their students had learned that:

'Their stories (as teenagers, as Black boys, as gay people, as sons and daughters, as friends, as siblings, as family...) matter.'



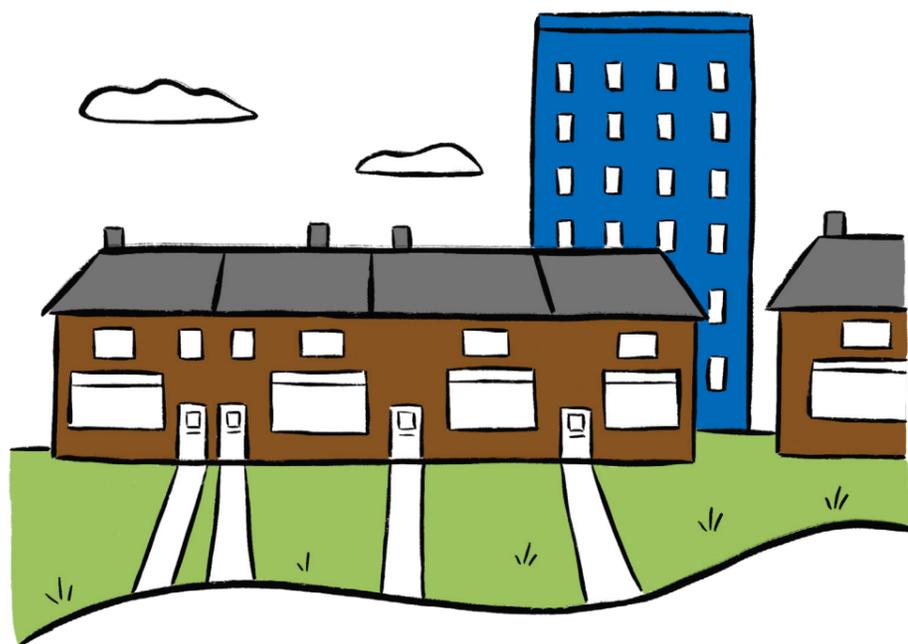
While 'relevance' is a somewhat contested virtue in texts for study, it was identified as a positive in these data. This connects directly to the concept of school belonging and its protective effect.

The concept of representation was raised by some teachers in interviews, and particularly as a reason for choosing to engage with the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot programme in order to better serve some of their groups of pupils. One White teacher drew explicit parallels between her own youth and the representation of her students in the curriculum they were being offered. She described growing up as:

'A long haired, bookish human being and therefore I was everybody's best friend in the literature that I read. I saw myself a lot and I never really questioned what it must be like to not see yourself represented. And so for

me, I always grew up thinking I could kind of do everything as long as I had a good mate to do it with. I was never going to be centre stage, but I was going to be on it.

And the idea that if you only grow up and see yourself in a very negative light that must be difficult. You know, again, I grew up on a Council estate and often when you saw stories about people on Council estates, they were really negative and it used to make me angry because that was not my experience. And I think that the older I've got, the more I've reflected on those emotions. And I think, well what am I offering the students in front of me? Am I offering books that make them feel part of the world? Am I offering them books that make them feel more ostracised or more angry?'



Case Study

Boys Don't Cry at Heathlands School for Deaf Children

Heathlands School for Deaf Children has a small cohort of students who undertake English Literature GCSE. British Sign Language has no written form, so children who communicate in it all learn to read and write English. But the languages are different, and for profoundly deaf children English counts

as a second language. This can mean that reading a text for literature study involves the difficult decryption of syntax and grammar just for comprehension, before they begin analysing it – but with *Boys Don't Cry* the students could just enjoy reading it and tackling it as a text. Ellie Monk, English teacher at Heathlands, was delighted in the change in attitude:

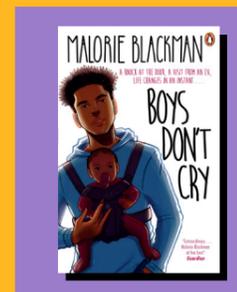
'It really changed the way my students view literature because they are usually like 'Oh, I really don't like reading - it's hard, those books are not relevant to me.'

The students confirmed this:

'Honestly, I have never really enjoyed reading books but this book has helped me in a lot of ways.'

– Tosif, a year eleven student

The use of a modern book with contemporary issues about race, queerness, toxic masculinity and teen parenthood was received with enthusiasm by students who describe the engaging class discussions they had around the book. Several students picked out the specific issues raised by teen fatherhood:



'I assumed that we all experience similar struggles but other people experience different struggles, i.e. teen fathers who experience more prejudice than teen mothers as there is a stereotype of them 'running away'.'

– Thalia, a year eleven student

Students talked about understanding the perspectives of others, but also seeing their own place in the world. Ellie talks about the significance of recognising diversity in the curriculum for these students in particular:

'It is really important to recognise and to represent diversity because it is the world we live in... and to learn about differences; culture, religion, race and whatever, and - to give the students the opportunity to learn about difference - I think that's really important. Because I am a deaf person, my students are deaf, we're a deaf school... We know it's important to recognise and learn about difference. It should be celebrated.'

– Ellie Monk

The choice has paid off: Ellie has enjoyed the text because of how different it feels from the other texts they study at GCSE, and the increased engagement from the students. The changes the school has seen through teaching *Boys Don't Cry* has inspired the possibility for that to be embedded throughout the English Literature curriculum.

“
**Students feel as though
 the text is meaningful
 beyond study, that
 is, it helps them to
 understand the world
 they live in better.**
 ”

However, largely teachers did not explicitly link the positive impact of the text to the racial identity of their pupils, highlighting the question of whether teaching directly engaged with the racial content of the texts. This reflects some of the unease shown in the first Lit in Colour report about talking about issues of race in the classroom, and the lack of preparation teachers felt they had for doing so. It also highlights the complexities of the anti-racist curriculum.

One teacher reported in the survey after teaching that their text was ‘very engaging for students - some have said it is the best book they’ve ever read at school. Others, that it is the only book they’ve read. It has prompted deep discussions as students feel as though the text is meaningful beyond study, that is, that it helps them to understand the world they live in better.’ While this is also of interest in terms of the ‘Understanding of others’ theme within the responses (see Table 2), it speaks to the data from the whole dataset pre-survey on what students think the point of studying English Literature in schools is. One teacher noted that by studying a modern text for A level, students came to realise ‘the fact that even when they read any books, that is literature.’ While the specific interpretation could be debated, the realisation that the study of literature is not limited to historical texts is an important one.

There was a weak to moderate positive correlation between the type of reader students identified as (from non-reader to avid reader) and agreement with the statement that ‘The English Literature curriculum doesn’t reflect the diversity of British society today’ (.200**) in the pre-teaching survey but the correlation disappears in the post teaching survey, suggesting a mild change in attitudes (but it may also be attributable to the smaller numbers).

Although the reasons given by the largest groups of students fell into the categories of learning for

Table 2: ‘What do you think the point is in studying English Literature in schools?’ (Pre survey)

Code	Pre survey (n=121, after excluding missing data)
Learning for the joy of it, or the enjoyment of literature	38
Widen Perspectives	36
Improve skills	25
Don’t know	13
None	4
Pass exams / get a good job for high pay	3
Learn a moral lesson	2



the joy of it, or the enjoyment of literature (38), or to learn more about the world, society and people in it (36), there was also a large number of students who believed that the purpose of studying English Literature was for instrumental reasons only. 'Improving skills' covers students suggesting that studying literature was primarily for the purpose of improving knowledge of vocabulary, or improving their own writing, or developing skills more generally (25), with an additional three who identified the purpose of it solely in terms of examination passes or increasing success in later life. A number said they did not know what the point was or that there was no point. Given these responses, the fact that students were less likely to report being 'often bored in class' in relation to school after reading the Lit in Colour Pioneers text*, and that teachers identified greater engagement as an outcome in the interview data, becomes

more important. In particular, given recent concerns over low uptake of English Literature at A level (NATE 2020), this could provide one answer to improve student enthusiasm for the subject. One student in interview identified *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as being the main reason they were planning to take A level English Literature.

Understanding of others

Students raised empathy and understanding of others as key learning outcomes from studying the text in interviews. All the students in one school specifically named becoming more understanding of pupils different from themselves (either because of a LGBTQIA+ identity or being part of a racially minoritised group) as an outcome of reading *Boys Don't Cry*, and discussed how understanding

more about the prejudices that others in their year might face had been eye-opening for them. They perceived that it had changed their behaviour.

Eight of the teachers responding to the survey also named developing empathy or understanding of others as one of the main points of studying English Literature for their students. However, there was little development of this concept of empathy and there was little sense of that empathy being a cause for action, suggesting it was more affective than cognitive.

Only one statistically significant finding emerged from the teachers' survey which was that after teaching the text, they agreed more with the statement that stereotypes exist about people of different cultures*. Stereotypes function as part of implicit judgement and decision-making in the brain (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974); becoming explicitly aware of them reduces their power to affect judgement. This finding does suggest that teachers were gaining some measure of racial literacy from teaching the texts. However, this finding is not as robust as the findings from the student survey because the small sample size means fewer assumptions can be met. There is a sense in the interview and survey data, however, that teachers felt they were also learning new things of use in regards to understanding social issues.

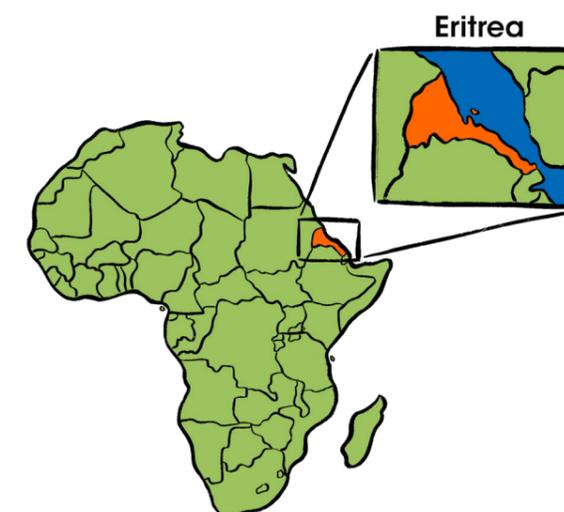
The content of the texts

Both students and teachers in survey responses and in interviews identified that one of the positive factors about the texts was about the contextual factual information linked to the texts. On one level this was as simple as the discovery by a number of students that **'Eritrea is a country'** (from students of *Refugee Boy*), to more complex lessons about

Empire and colonialism, as one teacher (White from a non-British background) noted in the survey on *The Empress*:

'I think that my students have taken away more knowledge about the empire and some groups of immigrants and how they were treated in the Victorian Era. I think some can also see why some groups responded so negatively to the Empire and how the British took advantage.'

This teacher also felt that they were learning more about the 'rich history of England, be it positive or negative' as an immigrant themselves. In both interviews and surveys students identified learning about homophobia, racism and the discrimination which single or teen parents face as being important learning outcomes from studying *Boys Don't Cry*. These responses speak to the importance of addressing the content and context of race and empire in relation to the texts as part of the learning, rather than simply relying on a change in text to effect change.



Attainment

One concern identified in the first *Lit in Colour* report was around the attainment of students. One interviewee suggested then that remaining with traditional texts also ‘maintains some form of data ‘control’ in terms of GCSE grades awarded.’ She noted ‘schools do not want to make a curriculum/ text decision that might affect GCSE success’ (Elliott et al., 2021, p. 56). Where one or two teachers in the interview data did express some concern about the change in text, it was largely linked to their confidence in being able to lead their students to attain highly with their previous set text (usually *An Inspector Calls*).

Analysing GCSE attainment data to look for cause and effect is particularly problematic for a number of reasons. One is that it is impossible to control for all potential influences; another is that because of the relatively fixed proportion of students that can achieve each grade level in each year, there cannot be an absolute increase in attainment. What we can say is that students answering on a *Lit in Colour* Pioneers text achieved across the range of marks, including at the very highest levels, as highlighted in the Pearson Edexcel Examiners’ reports from 2022 and 2023.

- On *The Empress* ‘Overall, the responses to this play were really strong’ (Pearson Edexcel, 2023, p. 142).
- On *Coram Boy* ‘A range of abilities were seen in this question but most were at least level 4. Candidates seemed to really enjoy writing about Otis’ (Pearson Edexcel, 2023, p. 207).
- On a question on *Boys Don’t Cry*: ‘this was extremely well handled by the majority of candidates’ (Pearson Edexcel, 2023, p. 226).

Six teachers answered the question on whether the change from their previous set text to the *Lit in Colour* Pioneers text was a positive change, all in the affirmative, but one did warn ‘however subject knowledge and critical/wider readings will take years to develop to the same level,’ recalling the barriers of Subject Knowledge and Confidence. One teacher in interview describing why they chose their set text put it in the context of departmental knowledge of the authors, and other texts that they taught at KS3 (i.e. *Teaching Noughts and Crosses* in Key Stage 3 meant that they felt confident tackling a text by Malorie Blackman for GCSE).

One interviewee in this study also contacted us to tell us that:

‘Our 2023 GCSE cohort performed above both our 2019 (pre-Lit in Colour) GCSE cohort and above the national average in their Literature P1/Section B responses to the Boys Don’t Cry questions. We are delighted to see the ‘risk’ of changing from a well-known text to a new text paying off. It is wonderful to see the students’ excitement and enthusiasm for Boys Don’t Cry translating into tangible results that will help them take the next steps in their educational careers (and hopefully, stoke a love for literature too).’

The case study from UTC Derby also speaks to positive attainment impact. Such findings may give confidence to other schools who have been deterred from making changes to their set texts because of concerns around attainment.

‘It is wonderful to see the students’ excitement and enthusiasm for *Boys Don’t Cry* translating into tangible results that will help them take the next steps in their educational careers.’



Other relevant findings

Reading more for pleasure was moderately correlated with higher levels of 'perspective taking' (.257)** for the post teaching survey of students. Greater levels of 'perspective taking' specifically have been suggested to be related to intergroup helping; in other words being more likely to help people not directly within your own social group (Davis & Maitner, 2009). Higher levels of 'perspective taking' in students were moderately correlated with greater agreement with statements from the cultural competence items:

- Cultures change over time and can vary from person to person (.350)**
- Human difference is positive and a cause for celebration (.455)**
- I take opportunities to learn about different cultures (.325)**

- Social context (e.g. power, privilege, and oppression) can impact the lives of people from different cultures and communities (.279)**
- Stereotypical attitudes and discriminatory actions can cause harm to individuals of different cultures (.317)**

The implication from this is that encouraging reading for pleasure is not only good for individuals but also for the society in which those individuals live (as per Dodell-Feder & Tamir, 2018; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017). However, the direction of the relationship is not clear: students who have high levels of perspective taking may simply enjoy reading more.

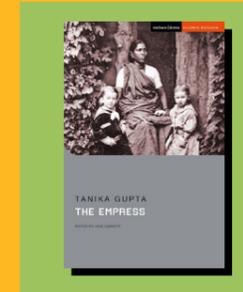
In the post-teaching survey there was a moderate positive correlation between being the type of reader students reported themselves to be and levels of agreement with the statement that 'diversity is part of British society and it should be reflected in the school curriculum' (.288**), suggesting again that reading broadens the horizons of readers.



Case Study

The Empress at Blue Coat School, Coventry

At Blue Coat School adopting one of the Lit in Colour Pioneers texts was a completely natural extension of the diversification of Key Stage 3 that they had already begun. In a school of 1700 students who speak 90 different home languages, it's a text which Assistant Head Teacher Gemma Hathaway says resonated with staff and students, and allowed them to delve into themes of belonging and identity.



they are engaged with the conversation and debate on the text in a way they haven't been before. Students are captivated by the text and engage more in class. *The Empress* is even persuading students to consider A level English:

'If I can find more books like that that I can study at higher levels of literature I would LOVE to study higher levels of literature.'

- Jayden, a year ten student

The impact of the text has gone further than the classroom.

'Parents and carers have spoken to us about *The Empress* in different ways...a lot of the conversations that I have had have been really positive because they would talk about how the student has gone home and talked about what they've learned, usually when they find something really interesting they can't wait to go home and tell their parents so a couple of parents have talked about how they feel their kid is really engaging with the text which is always really positive.'

- Harmanvindar Panesar, English teacher

'It's important to teach them a diverse range of texts because that's what we have in school every day. If they come to school and see a variety of different backgrounds matter to us then hopefully they feel valued in our school too.'

- English teacher Naomi Reid

Previously different sets studied three different set texts, but in transitioning the whole cohort to *The Empress* the school has seen unexpected benefits, as students have conversations between classes about where they've got up to in the text and their thoughts about the characters. Overall attainment has risen slightly. Students are talking to their parents about the text, and parents have responded positively to the change.

Teachers at Blue Coat specifically identify behaviour as an area where studying *The Empress* has had a positive impact. Students with poor records of attendance or punctuality have started coming to English lessons more, and on time, because

While *The Empress* has allowed students to have a conversation around their own heritage, and has sparked conversations about life in the modern world, the important thing is:

'It's a fantastic text to study in its own right.'

- Naomi Reid

Contextualising the research

A summary of research to date and relevant theory

One reason why the students and teachers undertaking the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot were of such interest is that there has been very little quantitative data generated around the effect of studying of texts by authors of colour. One interesting study from Arizona looked at the relationship between participating in high school courses characterised as Mexican American Studies, and found a positive relationship between taking these courses and passing state standardised tests or graduating from high school (Cabrera et al., 2014). They found this effect to be true not only for Mexican American students but for students of all ethnicities. Sadly, this finding was in the context of the complete cancellation of Mexican American Studies in Arizona. Limited small-scale studies in the UK have researched students reading texts by authors of colour. Cushing & Carter (2022) for example, looks at how students reading *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang were able to use the fictional racio-linguistic stigmatisation in the novel to explore real-world discrimination and surveillance in their own lives, demonstrating the kinds of pedagogical engagement which are possible.

In this section we look at the theoretical concepts which underlie the principle of diversifying the curriculum in general, and this research in particular.

Empathy can be either cognitive or emotional. Emotional empathy is the kind of 'fellow-feeling' that is the usual lay understanding of the word. Some studies have shown that reading fiction generally increases empathy levels (i.e. Dodell-Feder & Tamir, 2018; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017). However, a focus on empathy in the context of teaching texts by authors of colour risks reducing the anti-racist potential of curriculum in favour of veneration of individual feelings. Whilst there is merit in focusing on increased empathy as a result of learning about texts by authors of colour, we also need to think about the wider benefits of an anti-racist curriculum.

'(A)n anti-racist curriculum would involve showing how the history of modernity is shaped by racism, coloniality and white supremacy. So, while diversity might stop at the inclusion of BME people, anti-racism would urge learners to look at the socio-political context of BME people in relation to white people'
(Joseph-Salisbury, 2020, p.12-13).

This indicates the need for knowledge to support the teaching of diverse texts: it is not just about the presence of these authors on the curriculum, but also about engaging with the content around race and empire. There should be nuance here: authors of colour do not write only about migration, race

“

**Migration and empire
are not marginal events:
they are central to our
national story. As it
stands, the story we are
telling is incomplete.**

(McIntosh, Todd & Das, 2019, p.4)

”

and empire and White authors also engage with these topics.

The trait of cognitive empathy is a more productive one when thinking about anti-racist education. Cognitive empathy considers how well we can perceive and understand another person's emotions, rather than how much we can mirror those emotions. This can lead to individuals being better able to translate that empathy into action.

Both cognitive and emotional empathy have been shown to be positively correlated with prosocial behaviour (Yin & Wang, 2023), that is acting in ways intended to create peaceful resolution rather than conflict, altruistic behaviour of doing things for other individuals or groups, or reducing stereotypes. Increasing tendencies for prosocial behaviour is good for society in general therefore, and could be particularly good for race equity when the source

material improving cognitive empathy specifically focuses on race topics.

To adequately prepare students to be tolerant, confident citizens, these topics must be understood as integral both to our history and to the richness of British culture. All children and young people need to feel a sense of belonging, and understand their identities. 'Migration and empire are not marginal events: they are central to our national story. As it stands, the story we are telling is incomplete.' (McIntosh, Todd & Das, 2019, p. 4)

The empathy measure we have used includes groups of items on 'fantasy' and 'perspective-taking' (Davis, 1983). These are also aspects that speak to cognitive rather than emotional empathy. 'Fantasy' is the ability to imagine things differently, despite the connotations of the word in relation to the book genre. Maxine Greene's theory of social



The National Curriculum must 'provide education which deals with racism awareness and valuing cultural diversity'

(Macpherson, 1999, § 6.56).

imagination (1995) suggests that the first step in social change is being able to imagine the world as other than it is. This enables the prospect of changed race-relations.

Similarly, perspective-taking is the extent to which an individual is able to see the world from outside their own perspective and experience. These traits, taken together, are important for both seeing and understanding inequity and doing something about it. We also used a non-validated measure of cultural competence, which provides an appraisal of how well individuals are able to understand other cultures, and to see their own culture as one of many.

Empathy, fantasy and perspective-taking are particularly important for thinking about others. We also considered the ways in which individuals felt about their own schooling and the subject of English in particular. School belonging is

'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported in the school social environment'
(Goodenow, 1993, p.80).

It is an important trait because it has been shown to be a protective factor or buffer (Millings et al. 2012)

against a range of risks for teenagers, including mental health (Millings et al. 2012) and health risk behaviours (like drinking or engaging in underage sexual activity) (Resnick, Bearman, and Blum et al. 1997). School belonging also has a positive correlation with academic outcomes (Niehaus, Moritz Rudasill, and Rakes 2012) and with self-esteem. This could be the mechanism behind the findings of Cabrera et al. (2014) mentioned above. It is easy to see that a curriculum which recognises social diversity would be important for improving the belonging of students with a range of characteristics.

All of these factors link to previous recommendations such as those made in the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry report, that the National Curriculum must

'provide education which deals with racism awareness and valuing cultural diversity in the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society in which we live'
(Macpherson, 1999, § 6.56).

We are therefore looking at a range of factors which have the potential to reduce inequity, or stimulate future action to do so, rather than simply provoking emotional distress in an attempt to promote emotional empathy.

Methodology



We adopted a mixed methods approach, utilising an online pre and post teaching survey addressed to teachers and students (GCSE only) and an interview with a smaller group of teachers and students (GCSE and A level). Data were generated over the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years. All four exam boards (Pearson Edexcel, AQA, OCR and Eduqas) also supplied data on the number of students who answered on each text in the Summer 2023 exam series for GCSE English Literature. The nature of the structure of A level English specifications means that the same data cannot be recovered for A level candidates (question numbers do not correspond to specific texts).

Participants

An invitation to participate was sent to all schools participating in the Lit in Colour Pioneers programme in each school year 2022-23 and 2023-24. Schools which responded were invited to participate in either or both of the survey and interview studies. An incentive programme was developed with book vouchers offered by Pearson to schools completing the survey with a certain number of students to try to counter attrition rates between pre and post surveys. All participating schools were also offered the chance to attend research-led CPD sessions in 2024.

428 students completed the pre-teaching survey (265 gave their gender: 129 male, 124 female, 6 non-binary and 6 who preferred not to say); 249 the post-teaching survey (242 gave their gender: 116 male, 119 female, 4 non-binary and 3 who preferred not to say). This is a high level of attrition between surveys, but it is not unusual in the context of real-world social sciences research. It is also reflective of the nature of a pilot activity. This is discussed further in 'limitations' below.

Table 3: Ethnic make up of the student sample

Ethnic group	Pre	Post
White British	156	157
White Other group	29	20
Black Caribbean heritage	11	1
Black African heritage	24	12
Black Other group	3	3
Indian	3	9
Pakistani	3	10
Bangladeshi	2	2
Chinese	6	3
Asian Other group	8	7
Any other ethnic group	13	8
Prefer not to say	7	10
Total	265	242



Table 4: Ethnic make up of the teacher sample

Ethnic Group	Pre	Post
White British	21	12
White Other group	1	1
Indian	3	0
Asian Other group	0	1
Any other ethnic group	3	2
Prefer not to say	1	0
Total	29	16

Ethnicity data is given in Table 3; approximately 70% of those who gave their ethnicity in the pre survey were White which is slightly lower than the national proportion of teenagers, but broadly the sample is representative of the ethnic makeup of the student population. It is interesting that attrition was largest in the Black groups but there is no clear reason why that would be the case.

68 teachers completed the pre-teaching survey (6 male, 21 female and 2 non-binary of those who gave their gender) and 31 the post-teaching survey (2 male, 13 female and 1 non-binary of those who gave their gender). The predominance of women is in line with the demographics of English teachers. Table 4 shows the ethnicity data where it was given (by approximately half the teacher participants); again the large majority of White teachers of those who gave their ethnicity is in line with the make up of the English teaching profession.

The ethnicity of participants matters because the impacts of studying (or teaching) a text by an author of colour are likely to differ by the ethnicity of the student (or teacher). Students of colour who have seen authors and protagonists of colour represented in their curriculum for the first time, or seen issues of race and empire explicitly acknowledged, will have particular responses. Unfortunately, there were not enough matched responses from students (or teachers) of colour to be able to make any clear claims about different ethnic groups (see limitations below).

Teachers were asked to give how many years they had been teaching, in increments of five years. The sample was evenly spread across levels of experience, from teachers who had been teaching 5 years or less, to those who had been teaching for 20 years or more.

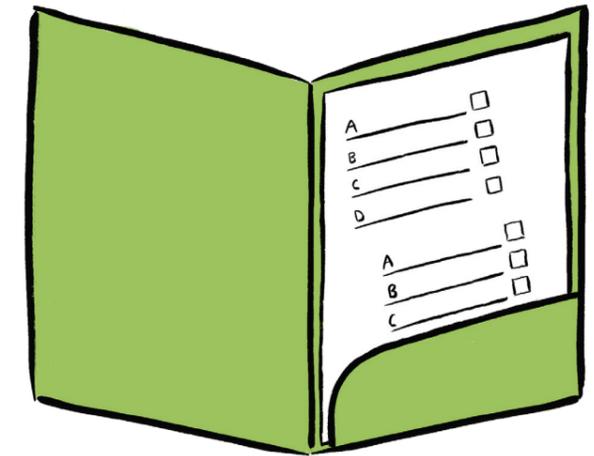
Interviews were conducted with participants from ten schools, including a mix of GCSE and A level students. Schools volunteered for participation. In each school two teachers and three pairs of students were interviewed. The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot contact teacher recruited teachers and suggested students for participation; the only suggestion we gave was that they should be students from across the attainment range. Students had to agree to take part, and their parents had to give consent. One school for deaf children was included, but only the teacher took part in the interview study, by the choice of the school, completing the interview via email.

Survey

The survey adopted a pre and post approach with students and teachers asked to complete the survey before and after the teaching of the Lit in Colour Pioneers set text. Participants were asked to generate an identification code that would enable matching of pre and post survey responses. Only 41 student responses could be matched between the pre and post-teaching surveys, which severely limits the number of findings that can reach statistical significance.

As well as demographic questions, the surveys included a set of questions on:

- attitudes to school and English Literature classes (adapted from Galloway & Strand, 2010);
- questions drawn from the Youth Survey reported in the first Lit in Colour report on attitudes to reading and school;
- a widely used set of items that form validated measures of Fantasy, Perspective-Taking and Empathy drawn from Davis (1983);



- and a set of items adapted from a self-assessment of cultural competency developed by the Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society.¹

In addition, in the post survey participants were asked to say which book they had studied or taught, what they had learned, and what they thought about the book. Teachers completed a similar survey, composed of the items drawn from Davis (1983) and the cultural competency items, together with questions on their specific text and the effect on their students. An overall score on Fantasy, Perspective-Taking and Empathy were generated for each participant, and for Attitude to School and Attitude to English Literature for students. It was not appropriate to do so for the cultural competency items as they were not a validated measure of a single factor.

Analysis was carried out on the matched dataset of 41 students, and also on the full dataset of both pre and post surveys. Findings are reported with identification of which group of students and teachers they are drawn from. Only results which reach statistical significance are reported. These are indicated by one asterisk*, which shows

statistical significance at the 0.05 level (i.e. that there is smaller than 5% chance of the result arising by chance), or two asterisks**, which shows statistical significance at the 0.01 level (i.e. that there is a less than 1% chance of the result arising by chance). Because of the low number of teacher responses there were insufficient matched responses to draw statistically significant conclusions on changes after teaching of the text. On the matched dataset of students significance was tested for using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks as it is non-parametric and requires lower assumptions. Correlation sizes are assessed using normal social sciences 'real world' standards; i.e. a correlation of 0.1 is considered weak; one of 0.3 moderate; and one of 0.5 strong. Statistical significance for correlations was calculated using a two tailed t-test. Some qualitative answers were coded for quantitative analysis (i.e. 'what do you think is the point of studying books in English?'); others were coded qualitatively (i.e. 'what did you learn from studying your text?').

Interview

A qualitative interview schedule about the experience of teaching and studying the Lit in Colour Pioneers texts was developed. These were semi-structured to allow the interview to follow points of interest

that were raised, and to build a rapport with students. The interviews were conducted in pairs for students and one on one for teachers. Interviews lasted an average of 20 minutes with students and an average of 30 minutes with teachers. They were transcribed verbatim and then analysed thematically. Quantitative findings were explored within the qualitative data.

Ethical considerations

The study was designed with reference to the British Educational Research Association guidelines for ethical research (2018). Ethical approval was gained from the University of Oxford (CIA-22TT-144). Informed consent was obtained from all participants in both the survey and interview study. Opt out consent was sought from the parents of students who were invited to participate in the survey. Opt in consent was given by the parents of all students who participated in the interview study. All participants were reminded of their right to withdraw before completing the survey or the interview. No one asked to withdraw their data from the interview study; survey data were anonymous at the point of collection. The incentives offered for completion of the survey were not sufficiently

'Gathering information in the context of everyday school behaviour is very important for generating knowledge about how education works.'

large to impact the ability to give free consent (BERA, 2024), and the questions were not intrusive or upsetting in nature.

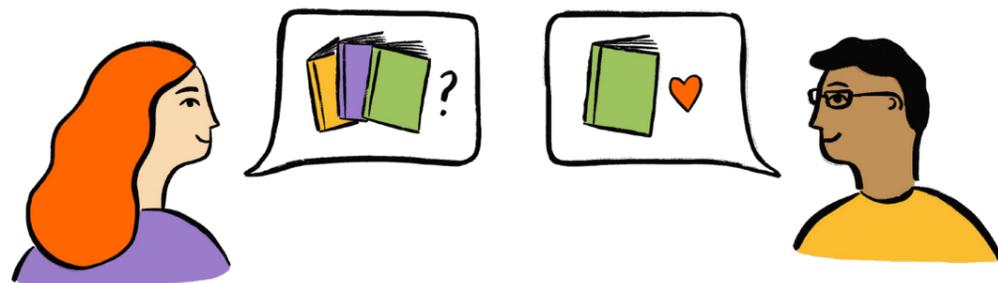
The research was funded jointly by Pearson and by Penguin Books, and access was provided through Pearson's administration of the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot. The lead researcher is a member of the Lit in Colour Project Board. The data collection and analysis were carried out independently of the funders.

Limitations

This research has demonstrated the challenges of gathering sufficient quantitative data to be able to make statistically significant statements in natural school environments, that is in non-experimental settings. Gathering information in the context of everyday school behaviour is very important for generating knowledge about how education works: many claims based on small 'laboratory' (i.e. not real world) studies do not hold up when they are transferred to the messiness of real life. However, despite having a committed group of schools taking part in the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot Programme, giving multiple opportunities to complete surveys, and inviting two cohorts of

participants, the eventual number of students completing both surveys was much smaller than we had initially hoped. Schools are busy places and the target population of GCSE students are particularly likely to have other things on their mind, or for their teachers to have more things they want and need to do than they have classroom time for. A higher number of matched responses would also have been desirable, but this is very difficult without asking students to give their names: doing that would have invoked data protection regulations, and would have required opt-in consent for all students, which would have had an arguably greater impact on the numbers of participants.

This limits the claims we have been able to make: larger samples are needed to show small effects as statistically significant. In particular, it would have been desirable to have a much larger group of students of colour to be able to see how studying a text by an author of colour affects them. Nonetheless, despite the limited data we are able to show some impacts, and therefore to start to show important relationships between teaching texts by authors of colour and certain outcomes. These limitations reflect the nature of a pilot activity: as expected we have seen some exciting indications of outcomes, and more research is needed in this area.





The nature of a pilot

What we've learned

This research is an important contribution in demonstrating the impact that studying a text by an author of colour can have on students, despite its limitations, because of the lack of pre-existing research in this area.

The context of the Lit in Colours Pioneers Pilot does need to be explored in relation to these findings. The Pilot evidently effectively addressed the barriers of time and money, by directly providing books, and resources that reduced the amount of time needed to be invested by teachers to develop schemes of work and teaching. Confidence in talking about race in the classroom and subject knowledge of works by authors of colour have also been improved, but these factors need deeper analysis and more research. They are intricately involved with pedagogical practice, and investigating how the texts were taught in classrooms was beyond the scope of this research. Future iterations of the Lit in Colour Pioneers programme may benefit from increased training in racial literacy.

The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot is significant as it has highlighted that change is **possible now and has begun**. While there has been a proportional increase in the number of students studying a text by an author of colour for GCSE compared to 2019, there is scope for a much greater absolute increase in numbers.

The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot has also shown, however, that this change required high levels of investment and effort to achieve, as the programme is swimming against the tide of 'normal' practice, current policy, and the social reproduction of canon. What is needed now to expand the change is for the tide to turn. A new Curriculum and Assessment Independent Review chaired by Professor Becky Francis has been announced, and this could and should provide a forum for these changes to be raised. Whether the future brings curriculum change, specification change, or more exam boards providing similar levels of support, whatever form it takes, the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot has provided a useful model to leverage it into system wide sustainable change.

Lessons for future action

General

- Alleviating the barriers to change (time, money, subject knowledge, confidence) identified in the first Lit in Colour report does work to enable change.
- A high level of effort and commitment was required to make change happen.
- An unusually high level of collaboration between publishers, and between publishers and Pearson Edexcel, was required to make the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot Programme possible through the donation of books.

Exam Boards

- Specification change is not enough. Schools and teachers need concrete support to enable them to change their set text choice and teach texts by authors of colour.
- A 10% share of candidates studying texts by authors of colour is an achievable target.
- Sample questions and indicative content play an important role in how the texts are taught.

Teachers

- Students can achieve a range of marks answering on a new text, including at the very highest levels.
- There are advantages in terms of classroom and cognitive engagement in teaching a text which is perceived as dealing with modern issues, and as being relevant to the lives of students.
- Teaching needs to plan for explicit engagement with the race aspects of the texts which have been chosen.
- Reading as a whole has the potential to improve cultural competency.
- The experience of teaching texts which are new to you and which require some background research can be a very positive one.

Teacher Educators and CPD Providers

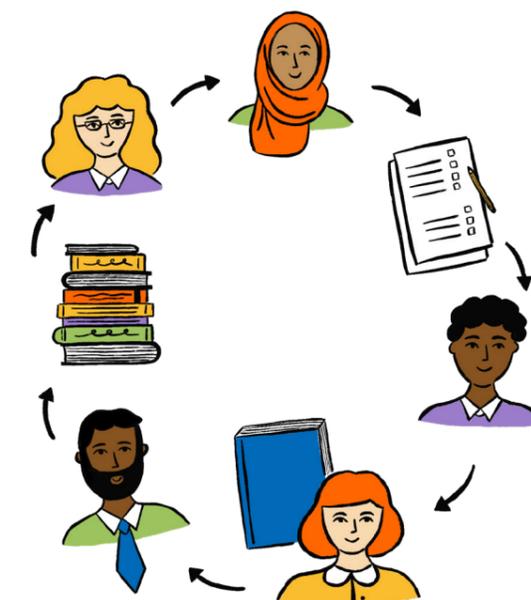
- There is a continued need for racial literacy training for teachers of English to support their teaching of texts which touch on aspects of race and empire (including canonical literature).

Policy makers

- Given the success of the Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot, the Independent Curriculum and Assessment Review should consider **the requirements necessary for enabling all students to access a broad and inclusive** range of writers that promote a deeper understanding of and engagement with race, empire and migration in English Literature teaching as this positively impacts students' engagement, empathy and understanding of others.
- DfE should establish formal structures of training and accreditation for Initial Teacher Education. For example, the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011a) should be updated to require training in, and demonstrated commitment to, anti-racism, inclusion and diversity in schools and curriculum.
- DfE should establish requirements for mandatory ongoing subject knowledge development and training on anti-racism, inclusion and diversity in pedagogy and curriculum development for all in-service teachers.

Further Research

- While these data are an important first step in establishing that there is an impact of studying a more diverse curriculum, the small scale of the study and the high level of drop off between pre- and post-surveys means that further research is needed.
- Further research is needed into the specific experiences of students of colour and teachers of colour when teaching texts by authors of colour.
- The extent to which teachers are teaching specifically about the race aspects of texts is not clear. Research is needed to establish how they are teaching about race, and if doing so explicitly has different effects on students.
- Tracking the take up of texts by authors of colour at A level is very difficult because texts do not map to questions as they do at GCSE. Research that achieves this would be welcome.



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